

Nursery Catalogs
Northwest Garden News
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I find it somewhat ironic that while Old Man Winter was making the rounds in early January reminding us that the Northwest really isn't the tropics the beleaguered postman was filling the mailbox to overflowing with mail order nursery catalogs. And so it came to pass that while my homebound spousal unit watched movies, refilled birdfeeders, napped and ate his way through a weather imposed hiatus from work, I voraciously devoured the contents of said catalogs as if they were manna from the gods.

Three days later I emerged from hibernation with a renewed appreciation for the power of purple prose and three pages of must have plants. Wordsmiths, usually the nursery owners themselves, pen vivid pictures of the spectacular attributes of each and every plant they list. They know, because they are gardeners themselves, that in the dead of winter we are easily seduced by flowery hyperbole and the promise of gardens to come.

At the top of my plant acquisition list is one that I have already killed once but want to try again. It was love a first sight for me and about 10,000 other folks who first spied this Chinese lovely in the Heronswood Nursery display garden at the Northwest Flower Show several years ago. The foliage of *Mahonia gracilipes* is lovely, the leaflets are green on top and shimmering white underneath. Bicolor flowers of rosy-pink and yellow appear in late summer and autumn followed by pendulous blue fruit. The lack of summer water was the cause of its demise but that has been addressed so I can only hope for the best.

Cotinus coggygria 'Golden Spirit' will be on many a wish list this spring including mine. Bright chartreuse-yellow foliage in spring and summer followed by an autumnal conflagration of coral, orange and red on a 12'-15' tree makes this a good choice for even the smallest of gardens. The gilded foliage could be a foil for the smoky hues of *Berberis* 'Helmond Pillar' and *Fuchsia* 'Isis' in the red bed. Look for it in the Forest Farm, Heronswood and Gossler Farms Nursery catalogs.

Reading about *Daphne x houtteana* in the Heronswood tome made me positively drool. Imagine a Daphne clothed in inky, purple-black evergreen foliage. Purple flowers, not as fragrant of the rest of the clan, oh well, are carried along the stems. Although the flowers sound lovely it is for the foliage that I covet this lovely. It might consort with silver-edged Heucheras, chartreuse grasses or pink or burgundy flowered Astrantias. It could be paired with pink or white hellebores and underplanted with a plethora of snow drops or silver-splotched pulmonarias.

Perusing the Joy Creek Nursery catalog is an absolute must for any gardener interested in clematis. New to the 2004 catalog is *Clematis heracleifolia* 'Little Blue' found on a mountaintop in China by Larry Lee from the National Arboretum. Tubular, pale blue flowers are borne in terminal clusters in late summer on this dwarf woody shrub. I can visualize at the front of my blue and yellow border forming a frothy skirt under a peachy-yellow dahlia and *Helenium* 'Butterpat'.

After trialing *Crocsmia pottsii* 'Culzean Pink' for several years, Joy Creek Nursery is releasing this summer blooming beauty. The funnel shaped flowers are apricot tinted with salmon attracting hummingbirds from late July until the end of August. Sounds like an exciting color variation for the coral and orange section of the wall garden paired with *Rosa* 'Westerland', *Salvia guaranitica*, *Canna* 'Tropicana' and *Parahebe perfoliata*.

And the list goes on and on and on---in fact it is never ending. There will never be enough space in the garden for all the plants I want to try. 'Tis the gardeners curse and blessing.. Just remember there is always next year.